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A HISTORY OF COSTUMING ON THE ENGLISH STAGE BETWEEN 1660 AND 1823

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The principles of modern stage costume were determined when the 1823 performance of *King John* under Kemble's management and Planché's immediate direction gained such popularity as to necessitate its reforms being made general. Between the time of the return of the actors after the Restoration and the time of this performance the stage had changed a disordered and unconsidered presentation of plays to a well-defined production on the basis of recognized artistic laws. The Romantic Movement had been manifest in the matters of stage costume just as in every other aspect of the life and art of the time; and though the epochs marking the progress of changes in theatrical costume are less definitely separated than are those which outline the progress of other expressions of Romanticism on the stage, yet stage costume did advance towards the artistic goal set by the Romantic Movement and was consciously determined by the philosophic principles as well as by the popular interests that controlled the course of the whole movement. That these Romantic theories and interests are evident in matters of stage costume even when they produced mere incongruities and inconsistencies in their nearly manifestation, I hope to show in this paper.

With the reopening of the theatres after the Restoration there came a time, as was to be expected, of rather chaotic management. It is not surprising then, that the costuming of the plays presented was at first for the most part a matter of chance or accident and was generally unhampered by theories of correctness or appropriateness. The records of the time, indeed, seem to indicate that the costumes for a theatrical performance were managed much as are the cos-

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tumes for charades in the average household today. The property-box was a sort of attic, under the control of the property manager, and each actor took what he liked or wished, choosing any costume which he thought suited to himself or to the character he was about to present.¹ The leading actresses were, perchance, given enough salary to afford to own a few good dresses for acting, but these dresses were worn for various characters. In general, such a state of affairs continued far into the eighteenth century, though modifications leading to a final establishing of order gradually crept in.

That costumes and scenery were, however, not altogether unconsidered even in the years immediately following the Restoration is evidenced in Downes's *Roscius Anglicanus*. For the years 1662-1665 are chronicled:

The Adventure of five Hours, Wrote by the Earl of *Bristol*, and Sir *Samuel Take*: This Play being Cloath'd so Excellently Fine in proper Habits, and Acted so justly well.²

King *Henry the 8th*, This Play, by Order of Sir *William Davenant*, was all new Cloath'd in proper Habits: The King's was new, all the Lords, the Cardinals, the Bishops, the Doctors, Proctors, Lawyers, Tip-staves, new Scenes: . . . Every Part by the great Care of Sir *William*, being exactly perform'd; it being all new Cloath'd and new Scenes; it continued acting 15 days together with general Applause.³

Mustapha . . . All the Parts being new Cloath'd with new Scenes.⁴

For the years 1670 and 1671 we find chronicled likewise:

The Tragedy of *Macbeth*, alter'd by Sir *William Davenant*; being drest in all its Finery, as new Cloath'd, new Scenes, Machines, as flyings for the Witches; with all the Singing and Dancing in it:

¹ That the property manager was sometimes guilty of partiality is evident in the account of the rivalry of Mrs. Barry and Mrs. Boutel and of their common desire for a certain veil which the property man awarded to Mrs. Boutel. In the ensuing quarrel Mrs. Boutel was wounded by her enraged rival. See Betterton, *History of the English Stage*, pp. 20-22.

² *Roscius Anglicanus*. A facsimile reprint of the rare original of 1708, London, J. M. Jarvis and Son, 1886, p. 22.

³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 25, 26.

the first Compos'd by Mr. Lock, the other by Mr. *Channel* and Mr. *Joseph Priest*; it being all Excellently perform'd, being in the nature of an Opera, it recompenc'd double the Expence, it proves still a lasting Play.⁵

From scattered accounts it is to be seen, also, that one post-Restoration custom was generally accepted—the giving or lending of garments or equipment to the actors by their patrons. Downes records of the years 1662-1665:

King *Henry the 5th*, Wrote by the Earl of Orrery. This Play was Splendidly Cloath'd: The King in the Duke of *York's* Coronation Suit: Owen Tudor in King Charles's: Duke of Burgundy, in the Lord of *Oxford's*, and the rest all New.⁶

We find recorded also:

The Play called *Love and Honour*, written by Sir William D'Avenant, was Acted before the Court, and very richly Drest. The King gave Mr. *Betterton*, who played Prince Alvaro, his coronation Suit, And to Mr. *Harris*, who played Prince *Prospero*, the Duke of *York* gave his Suit. And to Mr. *Price* who acted *Lionel*, Duke of *Parman*, the Lord Oxford gave his Cloathes.⁷

Another instance frequently noted is that when the players (of the Duke's company) were commanded by the King to Dover when he met his sister, the Duchess of Orleans. The actors played Shadwell's *The Impertinents* or *Sullen Lovers*. Downes says:

This Comedy and Sir *Solomon Single*, pleas'd Madam the Duchess, and the whole Court extremely, the *French* Court wearing then Excessive short Lac'd Coats; some Scarlet, some Blew, with Broad Wast Belts; Mr. *Nokes* having at that time one shorter than the *French* Fashion, to Act Sir *Arthur Addle* in; the Duke of *Monmouth* gave Mr. *Nokes* his Sword and Belt from his Side, and Buckled it on himself, on purpose to Ape the *French*: That Mr. *Nokes* lookt more like a Drest up Ape, than a Sir *Arthur*: which upon his first entrance on the Stage, put the King and Court to an Excessive Laughter; at which the *French* look'd very Shaygrin, to

⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 27, 28.

⁷ Betterton, Thomas, *The History of the English Stage from the Restoration to the Present Time* (London, 1741), p. 91. Also recorded by Downes, *l. c.*, pp. 21, 22.

see themselves Ap'd by such a Buffoon as Sir Arthur: Mr. Nokes Kept the Duke's Sword to his Dying Day.⁸

Chetwood gives explicit information concerning this custom and one nearly related to it. "It was a Custom," he says, "at that time, for Persons of the First Rank and Distinction to give their Birth-Day Suits to the most Favoured Actors." He adds that it was expected that the actor wear the suit so given whenever its donor and his patron was at the theatre. He gives an amusing instance of the consequent predicament in which the actor Mr. John Thurmond found himself when his benefactor unexpectedly made his appearance at the theatre while the donated suit was reposing at a pawnshop.⁹

The comment is scarcely necessary that such an array of borrowed finery could bear little relation to the plays produced; yet throughout the history of the theatre for the next hundred years there are records similar to these, records which show the general carelessness in matters of stage costume. Sometimes the actors were hard put to it to procure suitable finery. Tate Wilkinson in the middle of the eighteenth century records his entry on the London stage as the Fine Gentleman in *Lethe*:

Away went Shuter and myself to Monmouth Street, where for two guineas, I was equiped with the loan of a heavy, rich, glaring, spangled, embroidered velvet suit of clothes, and in this full dress, fit for the King in Hamlet, with my hair in papers, did I advance with timid steps through crowds of people: for Shuter's popularity had drawn the whole London world.¹⁰

He also throws light on the custom of the time by his record for the same year of the benefit for Mr. Baneroff and Mr. Costello on April 19. On this occasion they could not afford to hire a good suit for the Fine Gentleman, and all the best

⁸ Downes, l. c., p. 29.

⁹ Chetwood, W. R., *A General History of the Stage* (London, 1749), pp. 22-24. Doran in his *Annals of the British Stage*, II: 304, 305, says, "I think that this custom of noblemen's presenting their cast-off court suits to great players . . . went out before the middle of the last [eighteenth] century."

¹⁰ Wilkinson, Tate, *Memoirs of His Own Life*, (Dublin, 1791), I: 98, 99.

modern clothes were already appropriated by the best actors. Hence:

Mr. Whitfield, the wardrobe keeper, produced a very short old suit of clothes, with a black velvet ground, and broad gold flowers . . . this apparel had not been brought to light since the first year Garrick played Lothario at that theatre in 1746.

Bedecked in this sable array, for the Modern Fine Gentleman, and to make that appearance complete, I added an old red surtout, trimmed with a dirty white fur, and a deep skinned cape of the same hue, honoured by old Giffard, I was informed, at Lincoln's Inn-Fields theatre, to exhibit King Lear in. This grand dress, with an old stock muff, used for the Gentleman Usher in the Rehearsal, my hair in papers, as on my first curious exhibition, gave the *tout ensemble* to my accomplished figure.¹¹

That an interchange of courtesies might be expected in the matter is further suggested in the same author's account of his own benefit. The wardrobe of the theatre was inadequate to fit out *Jane Shore*, which had been chosen for the occasion.

But with the manager's consent, and Mr. Dexter's approbation, I wore Mr. Dexter's grand suit for particular occasions, which was a new blue satin, richly trimmed with silver, looked very elegant, and what was better, fitted me exactly.¹²

George Anne Bellamy adds the spice of the feminine gender to a story illustrative of the same carelessness of propriety in dress which she tells of the same period in the Dublin theatre while Thomas Sheridan was manager.

Early in the season, the tragedy of "All for Love, or the World Well Lost" was revived; . . . The getting it up produced the following extraordinary incidents. The manager, in an excursion he had made during the summer to London, had purchased a superb suit of clothes that had belonged to the Princess of Wales, and had been only worn by her on the birth-day. This was made into a dress for me to play the Character of Cleopatra; and as the ground of it was silver tissue, my mother thought that by turning the body of it in, it would be a no unbecoming addition to my waste, which was remarkably small. My maid-servant was accordingly sent to the theater to assist the dresser and mantua-maker in pre-

¹¹ Wilkinson, Tate, *Memoirs of His Own Life*, (Dublin, 1791), I: 100, 101.

¹² *Ibid.*, I: 173.

paring it; and also in sewing in a number of diamonds, my patroness not only having furnished me with her own, but borrowed several others of acquaintance for me. When the women had finished the work, they all went out of the room, and left the door of it indiscreetly open.

[Mrs. Furnival (who owed me a grudge—) accidentally passed by the door of my dressing room on the way to her own, as it stood open. Seeing my rich dress thus lying exposed, and observing no person by to prevent her, she stepped in and carried off the Queen of Egypt's paraphernalia, to adorn herself in the character of Octavia the Roman matron, which she was to perform. By remarking from time to time my dress, which was very different from the generality of heroines: Mrs. Furnival had just acquired taste enough to despise the black velvet in which those ladies were usually habited. And without considering the impropriety of enrobing a Roman matron in the habiliments of the Egyptian Queen; or perhaps not knowing that there was any impropriety in it, she determined for once in her life-time, to be as fine as myself, and that at my expense. She accordingly set to work to let out the cloathes, which through my mother's economical advice had been taken in. [Mrs. Bellamy's maid, she records, discovered the theft, was restrained by peace-makers from doing Mrs. Furnival bodily harm, but remained inconsolable. Mrs. Bellamy was forced to don simpler garments, but she still had the diadem.] The report of the richness and elegance of my dress [she modestly continues her story] had been universally the subject of conversation for some time before the night of the performance; when, to the surprise of the audience, I appeared in white satin.

[But the climax came when Mrs. Furnival appeared in her newly appropriated grandeur, for Mrs. Butler cried out, "Good Heaven, the woman has got on my diamonds." The house had to be assured by Mr. Sheridan that the jewels had not been stolen, but when the curtain went down for the first act, there were cries of "No more Furnival." That lady wisely took refuge in fits, and Mrs. Elmy was put in to finish the part.]¹³

That the costumes worn on the stage were shabby as well as lacking in propriety throughout the first half of the eighteenth century is the universal opinion of the critics of the time. Cibber gives many amusing references to Dogget's economies and to his anguished viewing of Wilks's extravaganees, when "for example, at the beginning of almost

¹³ *An Apology for the Life of George Anne Bellamy*. Written by herself (London, 1785, third ed.), I: 131 sq.

every season he would order two or three suits to be made or refreshed for actors of moderate consequence, that his having constantly a new one for himself might seem less particular, though he had, as yet, no part for it.'"¹⁴ Particularly painful to Dogget was the sight of new clothes worn during the production of an old play. And that similar meagerness in the theatrical wardrobe was found in the whole of the first half of the century is to be seen in all the records already quoted as instances of the lack of care in regard to propriety of dress.

Mrs. Bellamy, to whom costumes—particularly her own—were of primary importance in theatrical affairs, sums up the matter of early eighteenth century stage dress, making comparisons between the dress of that period and that of the period at which she wrote:

The dresses of theatrical ladies were at this period very indifferent. The Empresses and Queens were confined to black velvet, except on extraordinary occasions, when they put on an embroidered or tissue petticoat. The young ladies generally appeared in a *cast* gown of some person of quality; as at this epoch the women of that denomination were not blessed with the taste of the present age, and had much more economy, the stage brides and virgins often made their appearance in altered habits, rather soiled.¹⁵

The dress of the gentlemen, both of the sock and buskin, was full as absurd as that of the ladies. While the Empresses and Queens appeared in black velvet, . . . the male part of the *dramatis personae* *struted* in tarnished laced coats and waistcoats, full bottom or *tye* wigs, and black worsted stockings.¹⁶

The significance of these accounts, however, lies not in the fact of the prevailing meagerness and inappropriateness which they reveal as having characterized stage dress during the century after the Restoration, but in the fact of the utter failure of critics and actors alike to recognize aesthetic principles upon the basis of which theatrical costumes might be

¹⁴ *An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber*. Written by himself (Bellchambers ed., London, 1822), 384. The period referred to is about 1712.

¹⁵ Bellamy, *l. c.*, I: 51.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, VI: 20, 21.

chosen. The individual taste of the actor was the only artistic law known. The expense incurred was the only managerial consideration.

Even during this period of carelessness in matters of stage dress, there was, nevertheless, general conformity to certain traditions, some of them inherited from before the wars. Most important of these traditions, perhaps, was that which obtained in the custom of the actors when playing a character "of heroism and dignity," to wear a large plume of feathers. Davies quotes a passage from Act III, Scene 2, of *Hamlet* and explains it:

"Hamlet: Would not this, Sir, and a *forest of feathers* get me a fellowship in a *cry of players*?"

The *forest* of feathers alludes to large plumes of feathers which the old actors wore on their heads in characters of heroism and dignity. This practice was adopted at the Restoration, and continued in force till Mr. Garrick's era of management. His superior taste got rid of the incumbrance.¹⁷

Eccentricities that arose from this practice are suggested by Cooke's record of Booth, who as the Ghost in *Hamlet* wore a plume of feathers in his helmet,¹⁸ and by Boaden's account of an Emilia in *Othello* who by "out-dressing her lady and the aid of a rich plume of *feathers*," contrived to indicate to the spectators that she would do something at last.¹⁹

I have already quoted from George Anne Bellamy the record of the tradition which prescribed black velvet for empresses and queens. This same historian of her own time gives us an account of the venture of playing Lady Macbeth in white satin,²⁰ but any such departure was regarded as grave and unusual.

The traditional dressing of a villain to look the part has not altogether disappeared, but at least only in itinerant com-

¹⁷ Davies, Thomas, *Dramatic Miscellanies* (London, 1784), III: 90-95. It will be remembered that the actors before the wars are usually referred to as the "old actors," and that Davies is here evidently referring to an old custom taken up again after the Restoration.

¹⁸ Cooke, William, *Memoirs of Charles Macklin* (London, 1806, second ed.), 377.

¹⁹ Boaden, James, *Memoirs of Mrs. Siddons* (London, 1827), I: 72.

²⁰ Bellamy, l. c., IV: 465.

panies of melodramatic artists is there to be found quite such palpable giving away of the murderer's secret as was customary in the early eighteenth century. Davies, writing in 1784, again offers explanatory comment in a phrase from *Hamlet*, Act III, Scene 2:

"Hamlet. Begin, Murderer; leave thy damnable faces, and begin."

This contains a censure upon the custom of certain actors, who were cast into the parts of conspirators, traitors, and murderers, who used to disguise themselves in large black wigs and distort their features, in order to appear terrible; in short, to discover that which their art should teach them to conceal. I have seen Hipperly act the first Murderer in *Macbeth*: his face was made pale with chalk, distinguished with large whiskers, and a long black wig. This custom, of dressing so preposterously the hateful implement of a tragic scene is now almost worn out.²¹

Colley Cibber also commented on this custom:

In King Charles's time, this low skill was carried to such extravagance, that the King himself, who was black-browed, and of a swarthy complexion, passed a pleasant remark, upon his observing the grim looks of the murderers in "*Macbeth*"; when, turning to his people in the box about him, "Pray, what is the meaning," said he, "that we never see a rogue in the play, but, godsfish! they always clap him on a black periwig, when, it is well known, one of the greatest rogues in England always wears a fair one?" This story I had from Betterton, who was a man of veracity: and, I confess, I should have thought the King's observation a very just one, though he himself had been fair as Adonis. Nor can I, in this question, help voting with the court; for were it not too gross a weakness to employ in wicked purposes, men whose very suspected looks might be enough to betray them? Or are we to suppose it unnatural, that a murder should be thoroughly committed out of an old red coat, and a black periwig?²²

Yet Cibber himself justified this use of physical deformity and ugliness to make crime and criminals less attractive.²³

Certain traditions persisted in regard to the costuming of the stage witches also. These parts were generally assigned to the comedians of the company, who were at leisure during

²¹ Davies, *l. c.*, I: 92, 93.

²² Cibber, *l. c.*, 140, 141.

²³ *Ibid.*, 134.

the presentation of the tragedies in which the witches appeared. Davies comments on their regulation "gowns, beards, and coifs."²⁴

→ Of more significance, than the adherence to these particular traditions was the recognition given during this period to certain principles of appropriateness (which were not at all aesthetic principles, but rather the expression of a fundamental belief in the distinction between good and better, and better and best). For instance, a frequently reiterated belief was that the actors, as servants of the public, should not out-dress their masters.²⁵ Of course, it is barely possible that the servants of the public did not take too seriously this dictum of the critics.²⁶ It is likely that they took more seriously, however, the judgment of the critics and public in insisting that the good actress should have the good gown.²⁷ Gradually the tendency to overdress or dress improperly the minor characters of the stage world came to be frowned upon by both the public and the actors, and it was repeatedly emphasized that the characters of humble life must be appropriately dressed, as must the characters of exalted position. It was insisted, too, that those characters which were meant to be fashionable must be fashionably dressed and must not be arrayed in out-of-date finery.²⁸

[The most important distinction made was that between tragedy and comedy. It was generally acknowledged that tragedy actors must have the better costumes. The basis of judgment was the same that necessitated a different mode of delivery for tragedy than for comedy—the greater moral significance of tragedy. Apparently the only objections to

²⁴ Davies, *l. c.*, II: 118, 119.

²⁵ Cf. Chetwood, *l. c.*, 26.

²⁶ It is certain that Mrs. Bellamy and Mrs. Abington at least regarded themselves as the fashion models of their day.

²⁷ Sir John Hill in *The Actor* (1750), p. 163, says that he could remember "the audience bestowing their curses on the managers for not getting that good actress [Mrs. Pritchard] a better gown."

²⁸ cf. Kirkman, James T., *Memoirs of the Life of Charles Macklin, Esq.*, (London, 1799), I: 332. In one sense these latter demands are demands for realistic treatment of the characters, but that they were not consciously artistic is evident to anyone who reads of them in the works of Cibber, Davies, and Kirkman.

this order of things were raised by the neglected comedians. Cibber gives a full account of the distinction recognized in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries:

The Lincoln's Inn Fields company were now, in 1696, a commonwealth, like that of Holland. . . . Yet experience, in a year or two, showed that they had never been worse governed than when they governed themselves. . . . The tragedians seemed to think their rank as much above the comedians, as in the characters they severally acted; when the first were in their finery, the latter were impatient at the expense; and looked upon it as rather laid out upon the real, than the fictitious person of the actor; nay, I have known in our own company this ridiculous sort of regret arrived so far, that the tragedian has thought himself injured, when the comedian pretended to wear a fine coat. I remember Powel, upon surveying my first dress in the "Relapse," was out of all temper, and reproached our master in very rude terms, that he had not so good a suit to play *Caesar Borgia* in, though he knew, at the same time, my *Lord Foppington* filled the house, when his bouncing Borgia would do little more, than pay fiddles and candles to it; and though a character of vanity might be supposed more expensive in dress, than possibly one of ambition, yet the high heart of this heroical actor could not bear that a comedian should ever pretend to be well dressed as himself. Thus again, on the contrary, when Betterton proposed to set off a tragedy, the comedians were sure to murmur at this charge of it: and the late reputation which Dogget had acquired, from acting his *Ben*, in "Love for Love," made him a more declared malcontent on such occasions; he over-valued comedy for its being nearer to nature than tragedy, which is allowed to say many fine things, that nature never spoke, in the same words: and supposing his opinion were just, yet he should have considered that the public had a taste as well as himself; which, in policy, he ought to have complied with. Dogget, however, could not, with patience, look upon the costly trains and plumes of tragedy, in which, knowing himself to be useless, he thought they were all a vain extravagance!²⁰

In later years we find George Anne Bellamy giving due cognizance to the same reverence for tragedy in a racy account of her purchase-by-proxy of two "tragedy dresses" in Paris. However, she wore her "tragēdy dresses" indiscriminatingly as the Persian Princess in *Alexandria* and the

²⁰ Cibber, *l. c.*, 228, 229.

Empress Fulvia in *Constantine* and whatever other characters she played.³⁰

— — — The heralds of a coming change in matters of theatrical costume were, significantly, the same men that first attracted attention to new theories of acting: Aaron Hill, Charles Macklin, and Sir John Hill.³¹ Inevitably the Romanticism which affected every expression of the art impulses of the latter half of the eighteenth century affected stage costume also. And the realism which was the first demand of the Romantic Movement found its prophets and first priests in these three men. Their efforts and those of their early followers worked often for eccentricity rather than either correctness or beauty, but it is to them that we must look to discover the way in which the later theories of stage costume originated and developed.]

The earliest complete formulation of this romantic demand for realism in stage costume was given by Aaron Hill. In the *Plain Dealer*, under date of October 12, 1724, he gives an account of his meeting a "Party-coloured younger Brother, of the justly celebrated Mr. Lun" and of his being given a play bill for a puppet show at the White-Hart in St. Margaret's-Lane announcing, "Every Figure dress'd according to their own Country Habits." Concerning this announcement he rhapsodizes:

That, indeed, is a Stroke of Decorum, which out-soars, at one Flight, *Patent, License, and Charter!* And it will be reasonable to hope, after the Publick Taste has been so refin'd, by these *Chips of a New Block*, that we shall see no more Intermixture of the Ancient, with the modern Dresses: Where the Order of Things is so capriciously revers'd, that the Courtiers of an English Monarch shall stand round him, like *Beaux of Yesterday*; and the Sovereign himself strut about, in Trunk Breeches, and be dress'd, as *old* as a *Patriarch*.³²

³⁰ cf. Bellamy, l. c., II: 205-208.

³¹ For an account of their contribution to the theory of acting see an earlier paper, "The Rise of a Theory of Stage Presentation in England during the Eighteenth Century" in *Pub. of Mod. Lang. Ass.*, XXXII, no. 2.

³² Hill, Aaron, *The Plain Dealer*, (see Ed. 1734; published originally in 1724), II: 17.

Later, in the *Prompter* for January 24, 1735, there appeared a letter giving fuller explanation of Hill's ideas. This letter, signed by "Jeff'ry Cat-Call," is of the utmost significance and deserves extended quotation. The critic, after duly sorrowing over the introduction of the comic element in tragedy, even in Shakespearean tragedy, continues:

For this reason, I have been greatly offended at the ridiculous Dresses, in which our inferior Sons of the Buskin generally make their Appearance.—I have frequently seen a Duke, in a Coat half a yard too long for him; and a Lord High-Chamberlain, that had shed most of his Buttons.—I have seen Men of Proud Hearts submitting, unnaturally, to strut in tarnish'd Lace; And there is a Certain Knight of the Garter, who condescends to tye back his Wig, with a Packthread.—When a King of England has honour'd the Stage, with his whole Court, in full Splendor, about him, I'd have undertaken to purchase the Cloathes of all his Nobility, for the value of five Pounds.—It exceeds (as my Brother Satirist has it) all Power of Face to be serious, at the sight of so much Shabbiness and Majesty!

The Reason of This, I am inform'd, is that the Habits do not become Perquisites of Earls and Barons, till they have been worn out, by the Emperors of the Theatre; but, whether This is always the Case, or, whether those Noble Personages are not sometimes obliged to travel toward Monmouth street for their Equipment, I will not take upon me to determine.

The Bounds of Probability, in the Mean Time, may be as openly transgress'd, in the Appearance of an Actor, as in the Sentiments which he utters.—And the Dress therefore shou'd always be suited to the Person who takes it upon him.—An old Roman cou'd never with any Propriety, be made to look like a Modern Frenchman; nor a Dutch Burgo-master's Wife, like a Queen of Great Britain.—When, therefore, Persons of Rank and Figure are introduc'd upon the stage, they shou'd be cloath'd so as to represent Themselves, and not the Patch-work Inconsistencies of their Management.

They will say in their Excuse, that some of these Actors' own Cloathes, are as shabby, as those they wear in the Theatre; no matter for that.—Let us, for Humour's Sake, imagine a Painter Imitating the Example of these Brentford Princes of our Theatres; and drawing Pictures, for the Great Men, of this Nation. . . . Let us suppose him to have painted the Duke of R—d, with an immeasurable length of Perriwig, whose every Hair was as uncrooked as his Purposes: —Sir R—, W—, with his Pockets at the very Bottom of his Flaps; as if He were in Prospect of having no Occasion to Reach them,—And the Lord C—t, without a *Shirt*, as if the Cand-

our of his Soul, were to have been express'd, by the Nakedness of his Picture: wou'd not every one discern the Indecency of such unseasonable Fancies, and condemn that Fault in the Painter, tho' his Strokes shou'd be ever so natural? I am sensible, it wou'd be more Expensive, to cloath Every Actor with Propriety; so it would, to qualify Managers with Judgment. Yet, Both the One, and the Other, are what the Publick have a right to expect

Not content with mere theorizing, Hill attempted to follow his own teaching. Under date of October 23, 1731, he wrote to Mr. Wilks concerning his play of *The Generous Traitor* or *Aethelwold*:

As soon as the time draws near I will shew you, by a few light drawings, a beautiful, and no expensive occasion, for a novelty in the old *Saxon* dresses: which will not only carry more propriety, than the *modern*, but an equal grace, with the *Greek* or *Roman*: and may be form'd upon their spare ground-work; yet, appear quite *new* to the audience.

Under date of October 28, 1731, he sent drawings for the dresses to Mr. Wilks and wrote:

Leolyn, because a *Briton*, ought not to have his habit *Saxon* all; the rest have the authority of *Verstegan's Antiquities*, for the ground-work of their appearance; only I need not observe to you, that some *Heightenings* were necessary, because *beauty* must be join'd to *propriety*, where the decoration of the stage, is the purpose to be provided for.

For this reason, too, I had regard to a contrast of colours, in the several parts of each person's dress; and in those of the whole number, with respect to their appearance, together. These are little things, but I have often observed that their effect is *not little*.

To say nothing, as to *impropriety*, in the custom of dressing characters *so far back, in time*, after the common fashions of our days, it weakens *probability*, and cuts off, in great measure, what *most strikes* an audience; for it relaxes the pomp of Tragedy, and the generality, being led by the *eye*, can conceive nothing extraordinary, where they *see* nothing uncommon. It is, also, worth notice, that a fine, natural *shape*, receives great *advantage*, from a well-imagined turn of *habit*, and an awkward, unnatural one has an *air*, that *burlesques* dignity without it.

The *Furrs*, which you will observe pretty frequent, in the figures, are a prime *distinction*, in the *old Saxon* habits; and will have something of a *grandeur*, not without *beauty*. . . .

As to the *coronets*, it was the custom of those times, for persons of *high rank*, to wear them, upon *common*, as well as *extraordinary* occasion; but they must be distinguished, more than they are in the papers, to point out the different degrees; and worn in a more becoming position, higher off from the forehead, and a little leaning to one side. There is an advantage will attend the use of their long *single feather*, beyond *that* of the plume It will be light, and may be worn, throughout five acts, without warmth or inconvenience.³³

The principles of costuming laid down by Aaron Hill have never been superseded, though they have been much elaborated. His insistence upon propriety as well as probability in costume and also his insistence upon the importance of beauty in color and line mark him as indeed the prophet of things to come. In one respect, however, he differs from his immediate successors: he proposed the use of imitation materials and the adapting of old costumes to new uses. It is unfortunate that the drawings which accompanied the letter to Wilks last quoted have been lost. Like most of Aaron Hill's ventures, his proposed innovations for *Aethelwold* came to naught, but the fact of his scientific interest in the matter of costume is significant in any study of the stage.

Charles Macklin is the second forerunner of stage realism who deserves more attention than he generally receives. When he made his famous appearance in *The Merchant of Venice* in 1741, he wore a red hat. Cooke says:

A few days afterwards Macklin received an invitation from Lord Bolingbroke to dine with him at Battersea. . . . He attended the rendezvous, and there found Pope, and a select party, who complimented him very highly on the part of Shylock, and questioned him about many little particulars relative to his getting up the play, etc. Pope particularly asked him, why he wore a *red hat*? and he answered, because he had read that Jews in Italy, particularly in Venice, wore hats of that colour. "And pray, Mr. Macklin," said Pope, "do players in general take such pains?"—"I do not know, Sir, that they do; but as I had staked my reputation on the character,

³³ Hill, Aaron, *Works* (London, 1783), I: 88-91.

I was determined to spare no trouble in getting at the best information." Pope nodded, and said, "it was very laudable."³⁴

The same attention to correctness is found in the performance of *Othello* at Drury Lane in 1751 by a group of fashionables under Macklin's coaching. The dresses are said to have been "not only magnificent, but well fancied, and adapted to the characters.—Othello's was a robe, in the fashion of his country; Roderigo's an elegant modern suit, and Cassio's and Iago's very rich uniforms."³⁵ The most famous change made by Macklin in costuming a part, however, was the change effected in the dress of Macbeth in 1772. Cook's account of the matter is supported by that of many others:

Previously to this period, Macbeth used to be dressed in a suit of scarlet and gold, a tail wig, etc., in every respect like a modern military officer. Garrick always played it in this manner. . . . Macklin, however, whose eye and mind were ever intent on his profession, saw the absurdity of exhibiting a Scotch character, existing many years before the Norman Conquest, in this manner and therefore very properly abandoned it for the old Caledonian habit. He shewed the same attention to the subordinate characters, as well as to the scenes, decorations, music, and other incidental parts of the performance.³⁶

In 1750, a pupil of Macklin, Sir John Hill, published his work *The Actor*, in which he also enunciated the theory of realism in costume.

The dress of the player is another article in which we expect a conformity to nature; but this we expect in vain, especially in the women: the characters of an inferior kind are always overdressed.

The dress of the player is not only to be suited to the part but to the circumstances of it. When Orestes comes from the tumult at the death of Pyrrhus, there is no discomposure in his person. Mr. Barry is pardonable in having his periwig new dressed for the fourth act of *Romeo*, because the poet has removed him to Mantua, and there must have been time for such an operation: but when the unities are more preserved, this affectation is unpardonable.³⁷

³⁴ Cooke, *l. c.*, 92.

³⁵ Kirkman, *l. c.*, I: 333-342.

³⁶ Cooke, *l. c.*, 283, 284.

³⁷ *The Actor* (1755 ed.), 255, 256.

Such were the foreshadowings of realism on the stage in matters of costume. It is necessary, however, to remember always that opera and pantomime were enjoying luxurious presentation during the eighteenth century while the regular drama played a sort of Cinderella, shabby-sister apprenticeship before the coming of Garrick. On the opera stage elegant materials and expensive machinery had been the rule long before the most ardent exponents of the drama did aught but rail at these unworthy competitors of tragedy and comedy.³⁸

During the Garrick period (1742 to 1776) there was to be observed a growing luxuriousness in scenery and costume, as the drama, newly popular, was able to acquire some of the perquisites of opera. Stage kings and queens played in real velvets and satins and jewels, but Garrick did not contribute much to the idea of correctness in costume. In spite of the popular opinion to the contrary, the Garrick era was an era of inaccuracy in costume. Spasmodic attempts to follow the principles of fidelity to historical truth were numerous. Local color was often striven for. But the attempts were generally inconsistent, and there was little scientific interest in the subject, such as that which Aaron Hill had manifested.

The accounts of stage affairs throughout the eighteenth century abound in tales of incongruous costumes:³⁹ of a Cordelia played by George Anne Bellamy meriting Louis XV's comment, "Umph! very well! but her hoop is so large";⁴⁰ of Garrick as Macbeth, in "a scarlet coat, a silver-laced waistcoat, and an eighteenth century wig and breeches, as may be seen in Zoffany's picture, now in the Garrick Club";⁴¹ of the witches in Garrick's *Macbeth* arrayed in "mit-

³⁸ For typical accounts of opera and pantomime during this period see Cibber, *l. c.*, 60, 78, 79, 437; Davies, *Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick*, I: 92, 93; Foote, *Companion to the Theatres*, 85-87, 110; Dibdin, *A Complete History of the Stage*, IV: 18, 380, 381.

³⁹ Doran's *Annals of the British Stage* devotes a chapter to "Stage Costumes and Stage Tricks", II: 302-317. The chapter lists incongruous costumes from Betterton to Mrs. Siddons.

⁴⁰ Bellamy, *l. c.*, VI: 96-98.

⁴¹ Knight, Joseph, *David Garrick* (London, 1894), 111.

tens, plaited caps, laced aprons, red stomachers, ruffs, etc.”;⁴² of Garrick as Othello in a Moorish dress, which costume occasioned Quin’s giving him his much-detested appellation of “Desdemona’s little black boy”;⁴³ of Garrick again as Jaffier in *Venice Preserved* in a “black coat and smalls”;⁴⁴ of Cato in the person of Digges dressed, as Boaden said, “exactly like Sir Roger de Coverly, as chairman of a bench of judges”;⁴⁵ or of Cato as he is seen in the portrait by Sir Thomas Lawrence, on whom Fitzgerald comments: “With his bare legs and short petticoat, he looks more like a Highlander going to bed than that noble Roman, John Kemble”;⁴⁶ even of Mrs. Siddons’s Imogene in *Cymbeline* during the season of 1786–7 in a “froek-coat and trousers of our modern beaux.”⁴⁷

Stage armor was even more incongruous than stage dress. Boaden, writing of the closing years of the eighteenth century, said:

On the subject of armour, the stage has always been as badly supplied as Don Quixote himself; though the books of the theatre, and those of the Knight, are full of most excellent suits. The audiences of *Richard III* are doomed to *hear* of those steel shells, by which valour was so secured formerly. . . . Now it is no less strange than true, that, excepting the *breastplate* and *thighpieces* of Richmond, not one of the *dramatis personae* has the smallest particle of armour upon him, in either army.

Indeed, as to armour . . . (it) has been confined to *three* suits, of either *steel* or *brass*⁴⁸

The same writer quotes an antiquary’s comment on the 1799 performance of *Feudal Times* at Drury Lane:

⁴² Davies, *Dram. Mis.*, I: 145.

⁴³ Bellamy, *I. c.*, VI: 21, 22. Sir John Hill in *The Actor*, 152, 153, comments on this performance with his usual inconsistency. Of Garrick he says, “Had he contented himself to have dressed for Othello as he does for Macbeth (and whether that be right or no custom authorizes it) he would certainly have escaped all the little raillery which wounded him so deeply on this occasion.”

⁴⁴ Cf. the description of Zoffany’s portrait of Garrick and Mrs. Cibber as Jaffier and Belvidere in Fitzgerald’s *The Garrick Club*, 164.

⁴⁵ Boaden, *I. c.*, I: 126, 127.

⁴⁶ Fitzgerald, *I. c.*, 194.

⁴⁷ Boaden, *I. c.*, II: 221.

⁴⁸ Boaden, James, *The Life of Mrs. Jordan* (London, 1831). II: 41, 42.

"My God! a *commander* of an armed force blowing his own *trumpet*!—Gracious Heaven! Why that is a *Roman* habit, and that a *Grecian* helmet! There goes James the First's ruff—and Charles the First's armour—Shields of *all shapes*, cross-bows like pick-axes; and . . . a modern *parade Drum-Major*!"⁴⁹

Such tales have a certain piquancy, but they are not severally important save as they illustrate the general lack of concern for accuracy in matters of costuming. Of much more significance than these customary eccentricities and inaccuracies are the occasional attempts at correctness. I have already instanced Macklin's red hat in *The Merchant of Venice* and his old Caledonian costume in *Macbeth*. Occasionally these spasmodic attempts at correctness were made in the dressing of the principal character only. Davies records in his *Dramatic Miscellany*:

It is but within these twenty years that the plays of Richard III and Henry VIII were distinguished by the two principal characters being dressed with propriety, though differently from all the rest. Falstaff was till very lately, an unique in dress as well as character.⁵⁰

And Boaden in describing the production of Dr. Delap's *Captives* of 1786 said:

The only thing noticeable in the tragedy was, that Kemble appeared in the genuine Scottish dress, but had no other actor on the

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 31, 32.

⁵⁰ Davies, *l. c.*, III: 81-83. Miss Alice Wood's *The Stage History of Shakespeare's King Richard the Third* (New York, 1909), 108, 109, makes an interesting note relative to this comment of Davies: "Throughout the period great regard for costume, so far as richness of effect was concerned, persisted, but little was done for its propriety, as the portraits of the time show. In Hogarth's portrait of Garrick as Richard the Third the dress is Elizabethan, with trunks and hose, ruffs at neck and wrists, and the short sleeveless fur-edged coat, showing the puffed sleeves of the tunic. This costume is probably the traditional one from the Shakespearian stage, and leads me to believe that Richard, even in Cibber's personation, never appeared in contemporary dress, whatever the minor characters may have done." After quoting the passage from Davies, she continues: "This seems to have been true throughout Garrick's management. Whether Davies by 'propriety' meant that he thought Richard was in the dress of the fifteenth century is not clear, but his archeological knowledge as to the proper costume of that time, was probably not in advance of that of his contemporaries." See also the account in *Personal Reminiscences of O'Keefe, Kelly and Taylor*, (R. A. Stoddard, ed., New York, 1815), under "Reminiscences of O'Keefe," p. 64.

stage to keep him in countenance. These solitary flashes of propriety denoted the zeal of the great actor for the truth of exhibition; a time was soon to arrive, when he would carry his wishes beyond himself, and produce a tragedy on the stage, through the whole of whose characters, illustrations, or means, one correct, presiding mind should be clearly discerned.⁵¹

This sort of zeal was occasionally employed in gaining local color in costume also. The interest in China and in the Indies is reflected particularly in the drama of the century, but this interest did not secure scientific accuracy in the portrayal of dress or customs. For instance, the well-known picture of Mrs. Braecgirdle as the Indian Queen shows her in the satin gown—well boned—and the plume of feathers usual to an heroic part. But her bare feet are encased in sandals, and two black boys in barbarically scanty attire attend her to carry her elegant train and hold over her head a palm leaf shade.

In order to establish correctness as one of the principles of costuming, the essential condition, of course, was the knowledge of ancient costumes and old armor, as well as of the costumes of foreign peoples. It was thus necessary that the work of the archeologist and the antiquarian, the historian and the traveler precede that of the stage manager. To take account only of those events which were most directly influential in the matter of stage costume, it is necessary to remember that the eighteenth century was distinguished by the discoveries at Herculaneum and Pompeii; that the important Society of Antiquaries, reorganized in 1707, was put on its present basis in 1751, beginning in 1747 the publication of *Vetera Monumenta*, and in 1770 the publication of *Archeologia*; that in 1770 Bishop Percy's translation of Mallet's *Northern Antiquities* was published; that the first great popular history of England, Hume's *History of England*, made its appearance between 1754 and 1761, followed by Doctor Henry's *History of England* after 1768; that in 1711 an Academy of Painters was founded with Sir

⁵¹ Boaden, James, *Memoirs of the Life of John Philip Kemble, Esq.* (London, 1825), I: 325, 326.

Godfrey Kneller at its head; that in 1758 the Duke of Richmond opened a gallery of casts from the antique in Whitehall; and that in 1768 was founded the Royal Academy. Between 1803 and 1806 the Elgin marbles were brought to England. And in the early years of the nineteenth century were published Scott's works with their popularizing of antiquarian pursuits.⁵²

This interest in people of other times and of other lands was characteristic of the whole Romantic Movement; as it affected stage costume its most important manifestations were seen in the publication of works of costume in increasing numbers after the middle of the eighteenth century and through the first quarter of the nineteenth. According to Planché, the first English work of this sort, save works published in Latin during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was Thomas Jeffery's *A Collection of the Dresses of Different Nations, Ancient and Modern, after the Designs of Holbein, Vandyke, Hollars, and others*, published from 1757 to 1772. The most important work on costume, so far as the stage was concerned, however, was Joseph Strutt's *Horda Angelcynnan, or A Compleat View of the Manners, Customs, Arms, Habits, etc. of the Inhabitants of England*, published in 1775. This three-volume work is painstaking in its accuracy; it contains extensive descriptions and many illustrative plates. The author described it as, so far as he knew, "the first attempt of this sort ever made in this country," and it has remained the foundation work upon which later students have based their researches. Strutt's work was followed by a series of works of related character during the early years of the nineteenth century. And in 1814 was published a work making in its preface definite

⁵² Planché, J. R., in his *Recollections*, I: 224, says: "To Sir Walter Scott the honour is due of having first attracted public attention to the advantages derivable from the study of such subjects as a new source of effect as well as of historical illustration; and though his descriptions of the dress, armour, and architecture of the Anglo-Norman and Mediæval periods are far from correct, those in the romances and poems, the scenes of which are laid in his own country or elsewhere during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, are admirable for their truth and graphic delineation".

claims of particular significance. This work was Charles Hamilton Smith's *The Ancient Costumes of Great Britain and Ireland, from the Seventh to the Sixteenth Century*. The preface explains:

The Collection of Ancient Costumes exhibited in this Volume is selected from an immense mass of materials in the possession of the Author. It was originally begun for private amusement, and with a view to ascertain more correctly the Clothing, Arms, Decorations, and appearance of historic characters in the earliest periods of our annals than had as yet been attempted. It was evident that, notwithstanding the labours of the accurate Mr. Strutt, truth of costume was little regarded either by Painters or Actors; and it seemed that this inattention to so essential a part of historic representation arose from a prejudiced idea in a great proportion of the Public, which conceived, that the pursuits of the Antiquary are dry, tasteless, and inelegant; and that to introduce upon the stage or upon the canvas materials derived from such a source, must naturally destroy all beauty and harmony, and produce an insipid if not a burlesque effect. But an inspection of the following specimens will tend to prove the notion groundless, and shew that when the outline of the human form is preserved tolerably correct, the draperies and armour will not be wanting in beauty or grandeur. Far from diminishing the impression intended to be conveyed, an adherence to the Costume of the times represented will augment the illusion, and assist to explain the meaning.⁵³

This work was amply illustrated by colored plates. In 1815 this work was revised and enlarged under the title of *Costumes of the Original Inhabitants of the British Isles*, the author working in collaboration with Sir Samuel Meyrick. Meyrick's most famous work, however, is his *A Critical Inquiry into antient Armour*, published in 1824 and furnishing the basis of subsequent works on old armor and related subjects. The great work on British costume did not appear until 1834, when James Robinson Planché's *History of British Costume* was published. The author commented

⁵³ In Paris in 1804-5 was published *Recherches sur les Costumes, les Moeurs, les Usages Religieux, Civils et Militaires des Anciens Peuples*, by J. Malliot which professed the reason for its existence to be found in the fact that (I quote from the *Avertissement* to the second edition of 1809) "Les artistes desiraient un livre classique sur le costume et les mœurs des anciens peuples".

particularly on the changing habits of the stage in regard to dress and on the consequent need for a handbook of costume. He explained:

The taste for a correct conception of the arms and habits of our ancestors has of late years rapidly diffused itself throughout Europe. The historian, the poet, the novelist, the painter, and the actor have discovered in attention to costume a new spring of information and a fresh source of effect.

This interest revealed in the works on historical costume was paralleled by an interest in the costumes of foreign peoples which was manifested especially during the early years of the nineteenth century but which was not particularly influential in contemporary stage affairs so far as I have been able to discover. The work of William Miller (or Müller) was of particular importance.⁵⁴

To make available the knowledge of costumes and customs of the ancients and of strange peoples was, of course, the work of the scholar. To interpret this knowledge to the audience at the theater was the task of the stage manager and his assistants. That this task became more and more a necessary one as the taste of the people was educated through their knowledge of the results of the work of these students of research is, of course, apparent. Naturally, therefore, during the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century there was a growing importance attached to the position of stage manager and a new interest in stage artists.

It is, of course, apparent that the Romantic demand for realism embraced the demand for the use of real materials in stage costumes and for accuracy of historical detail and local color in their design. Garrick, as I have already said, did not make any noteworthy contribution to correctness in theatrical dress. He apparently was not interested in antiquarian pursuits, and whatever contributions he made

⁵⁴ For an account of the work of Miller, see the article in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Also article in *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1845, Pt. I, 102, 103. He was the author of a series of works in quarto on the costumes of China, Russia, Turkey, etc., published during the first years of the nineteenth century.

were made for the sake of scenic novelty and were offered as spectacular attractions to the public. He did bring about the use of elegant materials, real jewels, and similar luxurious trappings on the stage, but again he seems to have been interested in them not because of their answering the artistic demand for reality but because they were extravagances which the public would pay to see.

Yet however much Garrick failed to pursue the ideals of accuracy on the stage, he is to be reckoned as important in the history of the progress of stage realism because of his bringing to the English stage De Louthembourg. In 1771 Garrick met this Alsatian artist, already popular in Paris, where he had studied "stage illusion and mechanics," and engaged his services for Drury Lane, where he continued to work until 1781. Later he went to Covent Garden. The *Dictionary of National Biography* states rather overwhelmingly and vaguely that he reformed theatrical costume. Such a claim is not quite modest enough, but it is certain that De Louthembourg did contribute to the stage even before the Kemble period a distinct interest in accurate and effective costuming on the stage. Primarily his interest was in scenic effect, but he realized, apparently for the first time in the history of the English stage, the relation of costume and scenery, and the necessity for making both produce an unified artistic effect, as well as the necessity for making both accurately reproduce the environment of the characters of the play. On December 20, 1785, under his direction there was produced at Covent Garden, O'Keefe's pantomime, *Omai or Obessa, Queen of the Sandwich Isles*, the costumes being designed from studies made by John Webber, R. A., the painter who was with Captain Cook on his last voyage, and who painted *The Death of Captain Cook*.⁵⁵ As nearly as I can ascertain, this was the first performance on the English stage characterized by the attempt to secure absolute accuracy in regard to foreign costume by

⁵⁵ For an account of this performance see article in *Dic. of Nat. Biog.* on De Louthembourg, comment in the *London Magazine* for the month, and in Boaden's *Kemble*, I: 311, 312.

having dresses designed by an artist from studies actually made on the spot. De Loutherbourg's contribution to the realism of stage costume came because of his scientific interest in accuracy and because of his interest in producing the semblance of real life on the stage. His invention of stage thunder, of cloud effects realistically conceived, of the many mechanical devices for securing realism in stage effects, was in the realm of costume apparently paralleled by his desire to produce equally the illusion of reality. Of his realization of the artistic value of costume and scenery I shall speak later.⁵⁶

Giving full recognition to the work of the early realists from Aaron Hill to De Loutherbourg, we must still acknowledge that it is really to the Kembles that we owe the final prevalence of accuracy in matters of historical detail and local color on the English stage. Boaden sums up the state of affairs in 1785 at the time when John Kemble came into power:

Upon the London stage, nearly everything, as to correctness, was to be done. The ancient kings of England, or Scotland, or Denmark, wore the court dress of our own times, as to shape; and as to colour, the rival monarchs of England and France opposed their persons to each other in scarlet and gold-lace, and white and silver.

Kemble decided "that a grand and permanent attraction might be given to Drury Lane by increasing the power of Shakespeare." Boaden continues:

This he proposed to effect by a more stately and perfect representation of his plays—to attend to all the details as well as the grand features, and by the aids of scenery and dress to perfect the dramatic illusion.

La Clairon had already attempted something of the sort in Paris, the author adds.⁵⁷ In the words of Kemble's farewell speech at Drury Lane in 1817, his object had been throughout his career the establishment of "a union of pro-

⁵⁶ For the most complete record of De Loutherbourg, see Professor W. J. Lawrence, *The Pioneers of Modern English Stage-Mounting: Phillipe Jacques de Loutherbourg, R. A. in the Magazine of Art*, XVIII: 172-178.

⁵⁷ Cf. Boaden, *Life of Kemble*, I: 279-285.

priety and splendour in the representation of our best plays, and particularly of those of the divine Shakespeare.'⁵⁸ This object he sought to attain by the close study of antiquarian researches and artistic principles.

Commenting on the state of the theatre eight years later, Boaden again sums up the demands which Kemble had to meet:

Dress, too, was now become a matter of no slight moment; the costume was to be accurate, which was not expensive, and the materials were to be genuine, *not* imitation, which certainly *was* expensive, and very heavily so.⁵⁹

Certainly Kemble gave more consideration to both aspects of the subject than had ever been given before. In general, he fixed the lines of development for the stage of the next century, and the stage during his time attained a dignity and splendor in its productions which had been undreamed of before.

With the name of John Kemble, however, there must always be associated that of William Capon, an artist and antiquary of note in his day. Capon worked with Kemble at Drury Lane after 1794, when at the opening of the new theatre it was decided to put all the splendor on the principal piece rather than on the after-piece as before; and later, when Kemble found himself with a free hand at Covent Garden in 1809, he engaged Capon as stage artist for that theatre likewise and entered upon an era of prodigal expenditure upon scenery and costume under his direction. It is generally conceded that it is to Capon, whose knowledge of antiquities and whose antiquarian zeal made him diligent in producing scenery characterized by accurate historical detail, that Kemble owed much of his interest in stage scenery and in stage costume.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Quoted in J. F. Molloy's *Life and Adventures of Edmund Kean* (London, 1888) II: 30.

⁵⁹ Boaden, *Life of Mrs. Jordan*, I: 254, 255.

⁶⁰ Cf. Foote, Horace, *A Companion to the Theatres* (1829), 124. For a more complete account of Capon's work, see Professor W. J. Lawrence's article, *The Pioneers of Modern English Stage Mounting: William Capon*, in the *Magazine of Art*, XVIII: 289-292.

Kemble's most extensive contributions at this stage were made in Roman plays. In fact, we find him again and again referred to as "that noble Roman." Doran says of him: "That his sympathies were classical, may in some sort be accepted from the fact, that he began his public life in 1776—at Wolverhampton, with *Theodosius*, and closed it, at Covent Garden, in 1817, with *Coriolanus*." And again: "In one class of character Kemble was preeminent. He was 'the noblest Roman of them all.' His name is closely associated with *Coriolanus*, and next with *Cato*."⁶¹ Planché says that he was most interested in the production of Roman plays. And in general we see, I think, in Kemble's personal preference and in the general interest in Roman revivals which characterized the century the reason for the early insistence upon comparative accuracy in the dressing of Roman characters on the stage.

Curiously enough Kemble was apparently fearful of being taken for a dry-as-dust antiquarian in the manner of the modern college professor who fears to be "high-brow." Planché tells of a visit to Francis Douce which threw light on the subject:

This gentleman had assisted Mr. John Kemble when he introduced several alterations in the costumes of Shakespeare's plays, particularly those founded on Roman history; for which latter, however, he drew his materials from the columns and arches of the emperors, and not from the contemporaneous republican authorities. When urged to do so, and to "reform it altogether," he exclaimed to Mr. Douce, in a tone almost of horror, "Why, if I did, sir, they would call me an antiquary". "And this to me, sir!" said the dear old man, when he had told me of the circumstance, "to me, who flattered myself I *was* an antiquary".⁶²

That it was left for Charles Kemble to bring about the reforms more timidly inaugurated by his brother is to be seen from the following account of events leading to the famous performance of *King John*. The account is taken from J. R.

⁶¹ Doran, I. c., II: 276, 277.

⁶² Planché, J. R., *The Recollections and Reflections of*, (London, 1872), I: 54.

Planché's *Recollections* and constitutes one of the most significant of stage records:

In 1823 a casual conversation with Mr. Kemble respecting the play of "King John," which he was about to revive for Young, who had returned to Covent Garden, led to a step, the consequences of which have been of immense importance to the English stage. . . . I complained to Mr. Kemble that a thousand pounds were frequently lavished on a Christmas pantomime or an Easter spectacle, while the plays of Shakespeare were put upon the stage with make-shift scenery, and, at the best, a new dress or two for the principal characters. That although his brother John, whose classical mind revolted from the barbarisms which even a Garrick had tolerated, had abolished the bag wig of Brutus and the gold-laced suit of Macbeth, the alterations made in the costumes of the plays founded upon English history in particular, while they rendered them more picturesque, added but little to their propriety; the whole series, "King Lear" included, being dressed in habits of the Elizabethan era, the third reign after its termination with "Henry VIII.," and, strictly speaking, very inaccurately representing the costume even of that period. . . . It was decided that I should make the necessary researches, design the dresses, and superintend the production of "King John", *gratuitously*, I beg leave to say; solely and purely for that love of the stage. . . . Fortunately I obtained through a mutual friend, an introduction to Doctor, afterwards Sir Samuel Meyrick, who had just published his elaborate and valuable work, *A Critical Inquiry into Ancient Arms and Armour*, and was forming that magnificent and instructive collection now exhibiting at South Kensington He entered most warmly and kindly into my views, pointed out to me the best authorities, and gave me a letter of introduction to Mr. Francis Douce, the eminent antiquary, from whom also I met with the most cordial reception.

Mr. Douce most liberally placed the whole of his invaluable collection of illuminated MSS. . . . at my disposal. He paid me also the great compliment of lending me his fine copy of Strutt's *Dress and Habits of the People of England*, coloured expressly for him by its author. . . . Dr. Meyrick was equally kind and of great assistance to me, for of armour our artists and actors in those days knew even less than of civil costume. In the theatre, however, my innovations were regarded with distrust and jealousy. Mr. Faucett, the stage-manager, considered his dignity offended by the production of the play being placed under my direction. . . . Mr. Farley also took huff. He was the recognized purveyor and director of spectacles, and dreaded "the dimming of

his shining star". The expenditure of a few hundred pounds on any drama, except an Easter piece or a Christmas pantomime, was not to be tolerated. "Besides", he piteously exclaimed, "if Shakespeare is to be produced with such splendor and attention to costumes, what am I to do for the holidays?" Never shall I forget the dismay of some of the performers when they looked upon the flat-topped *chapeaux de fer* (*fer blanc*, I confess) of the 12th century, which they irreverently stigmatized as *stewpans*! Nothing but the fact that the classical features of a Kemble were to be surmounted by a precisely similar abomination would, I think, have induced one of the rebellious barons to have appeared in it. They had no faith in me, and sulkily assumed their new and strange habiliments, in the full belief that they should be roared at by the audiences. They *were* roared at; but in a much more agreeable way than they had contemplated. When the curtain rose, and discovered King John dressed as his effigy appears in Worcester Cathedral, surrounded by his barons sheathed in mail, with cylindrical helmets and correct armorial shields, and his courtiers in the long tunics and mantles of the thirteenth century, there was a roar of approbation, accompanied by four distinct rounds of applause, so general and so hearty, that the actors were astonished, and I felt amply rewarded for all the trouble, anxiety, and annoyance I had experienced during my labours. Receipts for 400 to 600 pounds nightly soon reimbursed the management for the expense of the production, and a complete reformation of dramatic costume became from that moment inevitable upon the English stage.⁶³

And indeed this performance of *King John* in 1823 did mark the climax of the struggle for realism in stage costuming, a realism evidenced in the use of real materials and in strict adherence to historically accurate designs.

However, any account of the Romantic Movement on the stage which included only a history of the growth of realism would be altogether misrepresenting the true state of affairs. Just as elsewhere, the Romantic Movement in its later manifestations was revealed on the stage by a new interest in classical tradition. In costume this interest was revealed by a new emphasis on beauty of line and by the consequent use of materials adapted to drapery. That such a result was inevitable is at once evident when one remembers the supreme importance of the Herculaneum and Pompeii discoveries and

⁶³ *Ibid.*, I: 52-57.

of the bringing of the Elgin marbles to England. The interest in sculpture evident in the forming of the societies which preceded the founding of the Royal Society is also to be considered, and likewise the translation in 1765 by Fuseli of Wincklemann's *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks*.

John Kemble is said to have been much interested in Roman dress—as in all things Roman. Doran says of him: “I think, in the old Roman habit he was most at his ease; there, art, I am told, seemed less, nature more”. And again he says, “He bore drapery with infinite grace”.⁶⁴ Boaden speaks of his fondness for Roman dress many times, and, indeed, the recognition of his appreciation of drapery is general among his biographers and critics.

However, Mrs. Siddons, rather than her brother, seems to have been the first to apply the lessons taught by Greek sculpture to the matter of stage costume. Her interest in sculpture probably was largely brought about through her friendship with the Honorable Mrs. Damer, a sculptress of some note in her own day. Speaking of the Kemble performance of *Coriolanus* in the season of 1788–89, Boaden says:

By a course of peculiar study, antiquity became better known to Mrs. Siddons; and Mr. Kemble also grew more completely Roman. Mrs. Damer had led her friend into admiration of the forms which she had modelled; and I presume it was from the display of that lady's talent, that the great actress became attached to the same pursuit. The application to statuary is always the study of the antique. It soon became apparent, that Mrs. Siddons was conversant with drapery more dignified than the shifting robes of fashion; and in truth her action also occasionally reminded the spectator of classic models. She had not derived this from any foreign theaters, for she had then seen none. Her attention to sculpture accounts for it satisfactorily.⁶⁵

Commenting on Mrs. Siddons in the season of 1791–92 Boaden again emphasizes the fact that her interest in statuary

⁶⁴ Doran, *l. c.*, II: 275, 276.

⁶⁵ Boaden, *Life of Kemble*, I: 425.

had made an impression in regard to "simplicity of attire and severity of attitude". He continues,

The actress had formerly complied with fashion, and deemed the prevalent becoming; she now saw that tragedy was debased by the flutter of light materials, and that the head, and all its powerful action from the shoulders, should never be encumbered by the monstrous invention of the hair-dresser and the milliner.⁶⁶

In his life of the actress, Thomas Campbell also gives prominence to this interest of Mrs. Siddons. He says that in 1789 or 1790, Mrs. Siddons visited a shop in Birmingham, and unrecognized, bought a bust of herself. Deciding that she could do better herself, she took up modeling. He comments:

This circumstance lead her to study statuary; and I have no doubt was beneficial to her taste in drapery and acting. At the same time, I distinctly remember her telling me that predilection for the classic costume was anterior to this period, and that one evening, in the second season of her acting at Drury Lane, when she had dismissed the fashionable curls and lappetts, Sir Joshua Reynolds came up to her, after the play and rapturously praised the round apple form which she had given to her head.⁶⁷

Campbell also quotes from Mrs. Siddons her own account of this interest. She is reported to have made the following statement:

Sir Joshua often honoured me by his presence at the theatre. He approved very much of my costume, and of my hair without powder, which at that time was used in great profusion, with a reddish-brown tint, and a great quantity of pomatum, which, well kneaded together, modelled the fair ladies' tresses into large curls like demi-cannon. My locks were generally braided into a small compass, so as to ascertain the size and shape of my head, which, to a painter's eye, was of course an agreeable departure from the mode. My short waist, too, was to him a pleasing contrast to the long stiff stays and hoop petticoats, which were then the fashion, even on the stage, and it obtained his unqualified approbation.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Boaden, *Life of Mrs. Siddons*, II: 290, 291. In this place also Boaden comments on the fact that the French debased the classical mode to an approach to nakedness, and he commends the temperateness and beauty of Mrs. Siddons's modifications.

⁶⁷ Campbell, Thomas, *Life of Mrs. Siddons* (London, 1834), II: 266, 267

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, I: 244, 245.

All who have written of their impressions of Mrs. Siddons have apparently noted her love for beauty of line and her consequent adapting of costume and gesture to secure the dignity and grace to be attained only by due regard for the preservation of the natural curves of the human body and the sweeping gestures of unhampered movement. When it is remembered that Mrs. Siddons was absolutely without a rival, that she stood unchallenged in her greatness, that other actresses took her as their model, and that, moreover, she represented the same interests that dominated the work of her brothers in their career as theatrical managers, it is easily seen how all-important was the interest in sculpture expressed in her own costume and in her action on the stage.

However, it was not a single influence, not even that of Mrs. Siddons's interest, that brought about new attention to the line of drapery. During these years when the Kembles dominated the London stage, the Academy leaders, Barry, Opie, and Fuseli, were giving utterance to theories regarding the importance of the study of Greek sculpture to the study of painting, and were stressing particularly the value of beauty of line. A perusal of their lectures will reveal the fact that just as costume on the stage came to express the tendency to preserve always the beauty of the natural curves of the body, to insist on beauty of line in drapery, and to value richness of texture in costume material, these ideas were finding their logical sponsors also among the leading Academicians. Hogarth had in 1753 insisted in his *Analysis of Beauty* on the value of gesture in obtaining restful and beautiful lines. Sir Joshua Reynolds had in his *Discourses* commented on the need for elevation and dignity in art. But in these later Academicians we find full and concrete analysis of these truths.⁶⁹

According to his biographers, John Kemble was always interested in painting and painters. Boaden says that he made daily rounds of the studios of his friends. It is impossible not to think that the theories constantly discussed in relation

⁶⁹ Cf. *Lectures on Painting by the Royal Academicians: Barry, Opie and Fuseli*, Ed. by R. W. Wornum, London, 1848.

to their application to painting should also have seemed applicable to the art of the stage, an art which he considered as seriously from an aesthetic and philosophical point of view as ever painter considered his art.

This association with the artists of his time also apparently led Kemble to take interest in the presentation of the supernatural on the stage.⁷⁰ Of course, this interest in the supernatural was characteristic of the whole Romantic Movement. On the stage, however, only very inadequate and unconsidered treatment had been given to ghosts, witches, fairies, and elemental spirits until the treatment of such beings by Reynolds and Fuseli gave Kemble and his associates new ideas as to the possibilities of their presentation on the stage. It is said that Booth as the Ghost in *Hamlet* wore cloth shoes with cloth soles, so that "the sound of his step should not be heard on the stage, which had a characteristical effect".⁷¹ For many years during a later period the Ghost wore armor while the young Hamlet wore a modern suit.⁷² The witches of *Macbeth* wore varying, but unvaryingly inappropriate costumes. Mrs. Crouch wore "a fancy hat, powdered hair, rouge, point lace, and fine linen" when playing one of the witches in *Macbeth*, even while Kemble was manager in 1788-89. Boaden is inclined to justify her dress on the ground that there must have been some of the fallen spirits who could assume a beautiful appearance.

Besides [he says], I know not why the stage should refuse those aids of elegance and fancy, which that inimitable artist Sir Joshua Reynolds introduced in this very caldron scene in *Macbeth*, and the still bolder imagination of Fuseli constantly displayed when dress-

⁷⁰ Fuseli was much interested in the presentation of the supernatural. His comment on the presentation of *Macbeth* sounds quite modern. (See *Lectures*, l. c., p. 454): "It is not by the accumulation of infernal or magic machinery, distinctly seen, by the introduction of Hecate and a chorus of female demons and witches, by surrounding him, with successive apparitions at once, and a range of shadows moving above or before him, that *Macbeth* can be made an object of terror. To render him so you must place him on a ridge, his down-dashed eye absorbed by the murky abyss: surround the horrid vision with darkness, exclude its limits, and shear its light to glimpses".

⁷¹ Cooke, *Macklin*, 16.

⁷² Boaden, *Life of Kemble*, I: 104.

ing the gay creatures of the element, that "live in the colours of the rainbow." The group did not consist entirely of witches—spirits of the four elements mingled in the incantations.⁷³

The *Dramatic Mirror* records the performance of *Macbeth* which opened the new Drury Lane in the season of 1793-4.

The scenes were all new, and the witches no longer wore mittens, plaited caps, laced aprons, red stomachers, ruffs, etc., (which was the dress of those *weird sisters*, when Messrs. Beard, Champness, etc. represented them with Garrick's *Macbeth*), or any human garb, but appeared as preternatural things, distinguishable only by the fellness of their purposes and the fatality of their delusions. Hecate's accompanying spirit descended on the cloud, and rose again with her. In the cauldron scene, new groups were introduced to personify the black spirits and white, blue spirits and grey. The evil spirits had serpents writhing round them, which had a striking effect.⁷⁴

Boaden was much interested in the whole matter and insisted that the stage should in *King Henry VIII.* copy Fuseli's treatment of the scene depicting the dream of Queen Katherine.⁷⁵ Boaden himself, he says, copied from Fuseli's notebook certain costumes for the 1798 performance of the *Bards of Cambrai*.⁷⁶ And for the presentation of Mrs. Radcliffe's *Romance of the Forest*, dramatized by Boaden, the treatment of the spirit was based on that of Fuseli's picture of the Royal Dane published in Boydell's *Shakespeare Gallery* in 1803. The desired effect was secured by suspending gauze over a portal. A tall man with stately tread was secured for the ghost. "A dark blue grey stuff made in the shape of armour, and sitting close to the person furnished the costume."⁷⁷

The increasing effectiveness of the stage treatment of supernatural beings was, of course, conditioned upon the better lighting of the stage and upon a greater variety of stage machinery. Indeed, if we are to trace the causes which led to

⁷³ Boaden, *Life of Kemble*, I: 417, 418.

⁷⁴ The *Dramatic Mirror* by Thomas Gilliland (London, 1808), I: 145.

⁷⁵ Boaden, *l. c.*, II: 121.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, II: 219.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, II: 96-98.

a new interest in costume and to a new realization of the value of costumes as an integral part of the stage picture, we must consider the physical changes of the stage during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. To quote H. Barton Baker's *History of the London Stage*:

A drawing of the interior of Covent Garden, made about 1763, shows us a stage lit at the back by six chandeliers, each with twelve candles in brass sockets. Garrick abolished these at Drury Lane when he returned from the Continent, substituting concealed lamps in their place and introducing footlights.⁷⁸

With a stage half proscenium, and lit by candles, there was not much scope for scenic effects, nevertheless Garrick engaged the famous Dutch artist Louthembourg, etc.⁷⁹

In *The Annals of Covent Garden Theatre* is reproduced an old print—perhaps the one referred to by Mr. Baker, showing this old scheme of lighting. Professor Lawrence likewise describes the 1763 print which is reproduced in his article on De Louthembourg. In explaining the significance of De Louthembourg's contributions to the theatre, he says:

That the scenery of Garrick's earlier day was, for the most part, a vague and ill-lit setting, arose from the circumstance that the candle hoops were hung well to the front of the stage, which projected beyond the proscenium into the pit. Strictly speaking, the scenery of that era can hardly be dealt with as an integrant factor in the glamour of the playhouse, as the actors had invariably to step out of the picture in order to get into the focus.

In a word, the drama in 1770, as in the days of Shakespeare, was still a rhetorical, not an illusive or pictorial, art. De Louthembourg did not reform all this, but in the course of a decade he paved the way for Kemble, who brought realistic detail and local colour to the theatre. Almost his first work at Drury Lane under Garrick was his introduction of a series of headlights or border battens behind the proscenium, at once depriving the actors of any excuse for stepping outside the picture beyond that of custom, and increasing the relative importance of the scenery by a flood of illumination.⁸⁰

However, it was not until the season 1817-18 that the London playhouses were illuminated by gas instead of candle

⁷⁸ Page 126.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁸⁰ Lawrence, *l. c.*, 173.

light, and it is not until the advent of this less temperamental means of lighting the stage that the definite value of costumes as a part of scenic effect came to be recognized. However, with a stage so lighted and so arranged as to include the actors in the scene, and with lights which made possible the arrangement of the stage with a view to lights and shadows, color and texture in garments became important as well as the line of drapery; and the recognition of the unity in the scene gave to the stage artist and stage manager new conceptions of the stage picture.

To trace the history of stage costume from 1660 to 1823, then, is to discover that the stage depended for the possibility of its development upon the receipts from pit and boxes; that it shared the aesthetic theories of the time in common with all other arts; and that its artistic effects were conditioned by matters of construction and illumination.⁸¹ For a time after 1660 there was not much attention given to matters of costume on the English stage, save that certain traditions in regard to the dressing of particular characters were adhered to. There was no recognition of governing principles save that the better actor and the superior types of play deserved the better costumes. The first part of the eighteenth century, also, was a time of meagerness and shabbiness in the theatrical wardrobe; yet during these years Aaron Hill, Charles Macklin, and Sir John Hill were heralding the approach of a time when correctness and beauty should be sought on the stage in matters of dress. With the coming of Garrick the fat years of the theatres commenced, and it was possible gradually to answer the first demand of the Romantic Movement for realism by using more elegant materials in stage dresses. The demand for realistic presentation of historical detail and

⁸¹ I have recently consulted the work of Adolphe Julien, *Histoire du Costume au Théâtre depuis les Origines du Théâtre en France jusqu'à nos Jours* (Paris, 1880), and have been interested to find how definitely the history of the French theatre parallels that of the English. I can see no evidence, however, that in matters of costume the French stage was directly responsible for changes made in the English stage. Indeed, the changes are too nearly coincident and the French stage too often lags behind, to permit such an inference. Other causes seem to me adequate to account for the changes noted in any case.

local color in costume was only occasionally heeded, however, and in general resulted only in eccentricities and incongruities when a progressive actor attempted to carry out his theories. The discoveries of the century, and the new impetus given to historical research resulted in the publishing of authoritative books of costumes after 1775. The new and improved lighting of the stage after 1765 gradually made possible the conception of the stage as a picture in which costumes and scenery must be regarded as one. Moreover, with the coming of John Kemble there was brought to the stage a new interest in accuracy and in splendor as well. The result was the designing and the execution of scenery and costumes under unified control. There was also during the Kemble régime a growing appreciation of classical beauty and a modification of costume designs to secure beauty of line. An interest in the presentation of the supernatural was also evidenced. The work of John Kemble was carried to its logical conclusion under the management of Charles Kemble, who had the invaluable assistance of Planché, an artist and antiquary whose chief interest came to be in historical English costume.

In the early nineteenth century, then, we find in England, a Romantic stage insisting upon realism in costume, a realism based upon the accurate study of authority, but also a realism modified by the desire for beauty of the classical type. We find a stage conceived of as a picture in which scenery and costume unite to produce a single effect, a stage which, therefore, demanded a unified control in the design and execution of scenery and costume, a stage which demanded also costly productions under expert managers and an army of artists and craftsmen. And such a stage has been the dominant factor in determining dramatic effect until our very recent theorists are forcing us again to search the foundation principles of our art to discover whether after all there be any good thing and true in realism.

